

7 Keys to Fitness Walking Success

Walking shoes

No investment in your walking program is more important than shoes. The dozens of quality brands and styles all tout their own unique features, which may or may not meet your needs. Consider your weight, walking speed, weekly mileage, and walking surface when making your decision. Ask the salesperson what to look for and why. Take along a pair of shoes you've worn for some time to show wear patterns to the salesperson.

Don't leave the store without putting both shoes on – over socks you'll wear on your walks – and trekking around for at least 5 minutes. Check for pressure points, friction, and slipping. You're going to log a lot of miles in those shoes, so be sure they fit and feel good.

Clothes

Comfortable, breathable material is important – it protects you from the elements and lets heat escape as your body warms up. It's okay to sweat, but don't wear clothes that make you perspire because heat can't escape. For cold weather, dress in layers you can peel off as you warm up. Wear light, loose clothing in warmer weather to keep your body at the right temperature.

Hand, wrist, and ankle weights

Use them as bookends instead. They have almost no effect on heart rate, offer only modest strength gains, and greatly increase your risk for injury.

Water

Drink 8 ounces of water about 15 minutes before your workout. In hot or dry conditions, also drink 6 ounces every 15-20 minutes during your walk. There's no additional benefit in sports drinks unless you're perspiring heavily for long periods, and even then water is a good choice.

Muscle and joint problems

Don't allow enthusiasm for your new walking routine to make you ignore your body's warning signs. Tired muscles aren't a cause for concern. If you've been sedentary, your legs and hips are bound to feel a little heavy and sluggish after your first few walks. Within 2 weeks, that feeling should subside and the spring will return to your step. But pain in muscles or joints during or after your walk may be a sign something is wrong. Any discomfort or pain above the waist also may be a warning. Be aware of your body... if you notice these signals, stop walking and consult a healthcare professional immediately.

A walking partner

Some people can stay more consistent if they have a regular walking partner. If you can find someone who shares your enthusiasm, can walk at about the same pace and for as long as you, the social aspect of walking can be almost as rewarding as the physical.

Don't rely on that person to be your conscience or you to be theirs, however. You're in this for you, not your spouse, your neighbor, or your friend. If your interests, schedules, and abilities are compatible, go for it. But if they struggle to keep up or you can't match their pace, or the company makes your walk less enjoyable, don't be afraid to go it alone. There are a lot of things besides walking to keep those relationships going.

About safety

Unfortunately, we live in a world where you must always be aware of your personal safety. Any list of precautions we present wouldn't be enough to cover all the situations you could face. Suffice it to say be careful. Don't take any chances by walking in a place or at a time when you're at risk.

